

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on General Farm
Commodities and Risk Management
1301, Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6001

July 27, 2006

RE: Wendi Rinehart- rancher / field hearing testimony at Wall, SD July 31, 2006

Thank you to the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify at this historical event.

My name is Wendi Rinehart. My husband Brady and I presently own and operate approximately 6,500 acres in northern Hyde and Sully counties of central South Dakota. We are very proud of the good American beef and Quarter Horses we raise there, and have been blessed to watch our three children grow into fine adults on a family ranching operation.

The 2002 Farm Bill has had unintended harmful consequences -- consequences, that have made it difficult to maintain the livelihood and way of life for us and many other ranching families across South Dakota.

Let me explain. As my husband Brady simply puts it, "Every time someone rips up prairie the price of grass goes up."

For those who choose to convert the virgin prairies to crop production, provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill provide them with generous financial incentive to do so. For those of us whose income depends upon the grasslands and livestock production, there is no such support.

It is well documented that during the last 20 years, more than 1 million acres of South Dakota forage lands alone have been converted to grain production at a current estimated cost to the government of more than \$40 million annually. This directly affects our ability to rent or buy additional grazing lands, and in a severe drought year such as this, the problem is even more acute.

Quite frankly I am disgusted with the misuse of tax dollars. The ranching community has found they are paying the government to fund these farm programs to put us out of business. Our tax dollars are being used to compete against us, supporting crop production on newly-broken rangelands that are completely unsuitable for that purpose. When you see rocks the size of Volkswagens being ripped out of the ground, there is something definitely wrong here, and it rips at your heart to witness the destruction of short-grass prairie. It forces ranch families to play the FSA game. They end up selling off cattle so they can collect the government-guaranteed checks for farming, or they go under.

Can we fix it? Can we begin to level the playing field? I believe so!

We were encouraged in 2002. The Senate passed an amendment that would restrict USDA payments on lands without previous cropping history. This provision would have in no way prevented the land owner from breaking or clearing their land. However, incentives would not be paid to do so. Now, that more or less sits folks where the livestock producers have been....at the mercy of the fickle markets, at the mercy of Mother Nature.

As Senator Durbin has said, "The farmers can still drive themselves to new croplands, but the GOVERNMENT would no longer drive them there."

I hope I have your attention now because I intend to be a burr under the saddle.

In 2002, Senator Durbin concluded that an amendment to deny farm payments on newly broke lands would save \$ 1.4 Billion over a ten-year period, money that could be well spent on programs such as the Grasslands Reserve Program. And I haven't even mentioned the conservation benefits of grasslands versus cropland. We're talking here of clean water, stable soils, and more wildlife. Honestly, when was the last time you saw terraces on the native prairie?

I don't have to tell any of you that we are in the midst of a four-year drought that some say is reminiscent of the early 1930's. This only exacerbates the plight of ranchers who are already short of grass. Isn't time to level that playing field for the ranch families who struggle to compete for the use of grasslands?

Our prairies provide our way of living. Like other ranchers, we work long hours with little financial return anymore, but we wouldn't trade our lifestyle or our values for anything else.

There is a hill above our home that I visit that gives a commanding, panoramic view of the surrounding countryside. From there you can witness the dust of tractor and plow ripping up virgin prairie somewhere.

I encourage you to please consider provisions in the new Farm Bill that will no longer support the conversion of native prairies to crop production at the taxpayer's expense.

If you would like to see first hand how this issue is threatening ranching families, I invite you here and now to travel off the oil roads, hit the gravel, witness the destruction of virgin grasslands for crop production, and come see our beautiful prairie.

Respectfully,



**Wendi Rinehart
32460-180th Street
Highmore, SD 57345
605-852-2321**

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2004.

Name: Wendi Rinehart
Address: 32460 - 180th Str. Highmore, SD 57345
Telephone: 605 - 852 - 2321
Organization you represent (if any): _____

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: _____ Amount: _____
Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____
Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: Wendi Rinehart

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Wendi Rinehart
2. Business Address: 32460-180th Str.
Highmore, SD 57345
3. Business Phone Number: 605-852-2321
4. Organization you represent: SD Family Ranch Operation
5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:
ranch wife, homemaker for 25
years and proud mother of 3.
6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:
7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:
n/A

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.